

Building Community: Gifting Time Volunteer Resource

Topic 3 – Creating welcoming environments

Gifting time to volunteer with an organisation is not a decision people make lightly. The online survey indicated there are a number of reasons for choosing to volunteer including learning new skills, giving back to the community, gaining understanding and meeting new friends. The desire to volunteer does not always translate into registering with an organisation though as there are a number of barriers and uncertainties to overcome.

Barriers to Volunteering

Some of these relate to time constraints, transport difficulties, bureaucracy, family commitments, and personal conflict. Approximately 12% of respondents to the Building Community: Gifting Time Community Survey (the survey) cited feeling unwelcomed as a reason for not volunteering.

At the Community Forum the task set for participants was to share ideas about how organisations can foster inclusive and welcoming environments for volunteers.

What strategies can be used to ensure volunteers feel welcomed in organisations?

Volunteer Recruitment

Creating a welcoming environment starts with the recruitment process. There is only one chance to make a first impression so make it one that is friendly, honest, and open. Although it is very important to clarify the volunteer roles and responsibilities, it is also as important to listen to the volunteer and gain an understanding of their interests and skills.

Easy Paperwork

Official paperwork cannot be avoided and on top of this there will be induction and orientation training. Always explain why this is required. Try and make the process as simple as possible, for example have online and paper forms available for new volunteers to complete and avoid collecting unnecessary information. Let them know from the outset what other opportunities are available to them for professional development or learning new skills.

Accessible and Inclusive

Create a work environment that is welcoming for people of all abilities, cultures and backgrounds.

- What physical barriers are there that may prevent a person with mobility challenges from volunteering?
- Do barriers exist for people with hidden disabilities such as vision or hearing impairment, people who are nonverbal or have an intellectual disability?
- Are there volunteering roles that people with small children could participate in?
- Are there opportunities at your organisation that enable people to volunteer from home?

Consider including cross cultural training and similar courses to become a more inclusive and welcoming organisation.

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Support for Volunteers

Making volunteers feel welcome will be enhanced by providing them with a mentor or buddy to help them find their feet for the first few days or weeks. Make them feel part of the team with branded clothing, regular team catch ups and social activities, and share organisational values, vision, and structure and if appropriate involve volunteers in strategic planning.

Reward and Recognition

Volunteers gift their time to your organisation for a variety of reasons. Reward and recognition of their valuable contribution to your organisation is key to retaining existing volunteers and recruiting others. Volunteers that feel valued and welcome in your organisation will be more likely to stay longer and share their positive experiences and encourage others to volunteer.

Resources

Accessible Environments

[A way with words: Guideline for the portrayal of people with a disability](#)

[Inclusive Volunteering – Carers Queensland](#)

[Creating Accessible and Inclusive Communication - Includeability](#)

[Creating an accessible and inclusive workplace – Includeability](#)

Training

[Cultural Training – TribalLink](#)

[Cultural Training – Multicultural Australia](#)

[Multicultural Advisory Team – Sunshine Coast](#)

[Psychological First Aid – Red Cross](#)

[Disability Awareness Training](#)

[Dementia Australia – Dementia Friend Training](#)

Celebrations

[National Volunteers Week](#)

[International Volunteer Day](#)

Support

[Volunteering Resource Hub – Volunteering Australia](#)

[Volunteering Queensland](#)

[Volunteering Sunshine Coast](#)